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ABSTRACT

Examining the trend toward an older U.S. population, this paper discusses why educators and school facility planners should consider designing multipurpose schools that specifically contribute to stronger intergenerational links. Reasons include: ending age segregation, enriching the lives of children and seniors, creating support for public education, and keeping seniors healthy and learning. The paper also discusses the challenges and opportunities of such efforts, including the diversity of retirees, issues of joint venture, funding, cost savings, accessibility, finding space, using space wisely, giving new life to historic school buildings, security, and staffing. The paper includes brief descriptions of several example schools. (Contains 15 references.) (EV)

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Catching the Age Wave: Building Schools With Senior Citizens in Mind

National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities

Kevin J. Sullivan
October 2002

Over the next decade, three significant demographic trends will alter the traditional base of support for public education and will greatly influence the planning and design of our nation's public and private schools.

As the first wave of 80 million Americans born between 1946 and 1964 begin retiring in 2011, the ranks of citizens over the age of sixty-five will double from 35 to 70 million over the next twenty-five years. This is trend one.

Second, this increase in elderly Americans will occur just as the percentage of families with children reaches a new historic low. By 2010, based on U.S. Census Bureau projections, "families with children will account for little more than one-quarter of all households—the lowest share in recorded U.S. history" (Galston 1998). This trend is not as startling as it may first seem in a nation with a growing population. Many Americans are simply living longer; many more are living alone because they have either delayed getting married, gotten divorced, never married, or have outlived a spouse. But the fact remains that we will soon be entering an era when there will be many more older Americans and fewer families with children in school.

And third, the number of children going to school will begin to increase again in 2010. According to the U.S. Department of Education, the explosive growth of the last decade and a half—the baby-boom echo—is tapering off and, from 2000 to 2010, school enrollment will stabilize at around 53 million students. Unlike the first baby boom of the 1950s and 1960s, the current baby-boom echo will not terminate in a sharp decline in births and school enrollments.

Indeed, just the opposite will happen. The Department of Education expects the number of school-age children to begin rising again in 2010 and create a pattern of steady increases—the Millenni boom. An increase of six percent is projected between 2010 and 2020, with about 55 million children expected in 2020 and 60 million in 2030. More and more of these new students will be the children of immigrants. Between 2000 and 2020, the number of Hispanic children, for example, will increase by sixty percent, from 7.9 million to 12.7 million.

Synergy or Self Interest?

What do these three trends foretell? One possibility is that the majority of taxpayers no longer will have a direct and immediate interest in the education of America's children, much less the design of new schools. "The direct appeal of parental self-interest no longer will suffice to support child-friendly policies as it did during the height of the baby boom" (Galston 1998).

Indeed, with millions of new retirees worried about rising costs in health care, competition will mount for public funds. Retirees who have already raised their children may see no immediate or persuasive reason to support public education. Some believe that generational tensions may create "a growing split between an upscale electorate and tens of millions of children—many of them poor, minority, or immigrant—on whom our future will depend" (Galston 1998).

Another possible outcome is that school officials may discover that the facilities being built now no longer meet all the needs of their communities in 2020. Schools built today will be only halfway through their life cycle when millions of baby boomers begin retiring. These aging baby boomers will seek new ways to spend

their time and may even want increased access to the public facilities built by their tax dollars.

A third possible outcome is that today's educators could take the lead in forging a new intergenerational coalition of support for public education—a coalition that places a premium on building new facilities for multipurpose use and directs special attention to the coming wave of baby boomers.

All these alternatives suggest that educators and facility planners should be looking ahead, thinking about how to engage the broader community in creating new opportunities for intergenerational connections and new ways to share school facilities with senior citizens.

At first glance, the large increase in retirees and the fact that fewer families will be sending their children to public schools does not bode well for public education. Some people foresee a generational war over scarce public dollars. But this may be jumping to conclusions. According to Marc Freedman (1999), "[t]he research to date shows that older adults do not vote monolithically in response to these bond issues." He lists three factors that define how seniors vote on school bonds:

- how high the existing tax burden is,
- how good a job older adults believe schools are doing, and
- how connected older adults are to local schools.

In fact, senior citizens often are the backbone and core volunteers for thousands of school mentoring and tutoring programs, including established programs, such as Foster Grandparents and RSVP (Retired and Senior Volunteer Program), that encourage such initiatives.

Sharing Facilities: Schools as Community Learning Centers

The idea of sharing facilities is not new. Community schools have been a presence in public education for more than seventy years, since the first one was created in Flint, Michigan, in the 1930s. Support for community schools has waxed and waned through the years. In the 1990s, the concept received new support as mayors, foundations, and educators in urban areas began envisioning community schools as a smart way to provide social services to waves of new immigrants flooding into their cities and schools.

Pleasure Ridge Park High School Nutrition Program

Louisville, Kentucky

The Jefferson County School Board operates a thriving senior center program at four schools in Louisville, Kentucky. The program is a collaborative effort between the county department of human services, the Kentuckiana Regional Planning and Development Agency Area Agency on Aging, the Kentucky Cabinet for Human Resources, and the public schools. One center has been located at the Pleasure Ridge Park High School for more than ten years. "When we began," said program director Steve Ilnick, "we took over a math class; now, we have about 1,800 square feet, which includes an exercise room and a combination game room and lounge, but space has been the obstacle."

The program originally focused on nutrition. Seniors still eat their meals in the school cafeteria, but the program has grown into a thriving intergenerational initiative. Twenty-five to thirty seniors actively tutor through the America-Reads challenge. Senior citizens also chaperone all the school dances, judge the homecoming floats, participate in school field trips, and audit classes. One married couple actually celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary at the school with students. The school cafeteria provides meals for seniors daily, and students deliver meals to the homebound elderly every Friday. The center has received Kentucky's senior center of the year award for its intergenerational initiatives.

At the same time, a small number of educators and architects began questioning the traditional idea of stand-alone school facilities with limited community access. Instead of traditional, hard-and-fast boundaries between community and school, they encouraged a blurring of these boundaries. This approach has been supported by convincing new research documenting the importance of active parental involvement, the growing importance of life-long learning, and a new recognition that communities have many assets to offer that are themselves important learning tools.

More support for sharing facilities has come from community-minded advocates who want increased citizen involvement in the design and planning of new schools and who see 21st-century schools as community learning centers—open later and longer and for more people.

Sharing facilities has been eagerly embraced by advocates for after-school activities and by parents concerned about the safety of their children. "It makes no sense to lock up costly buildings two-thirds of every day and one-quarter of every year," says AARP past president Joe Perkins. "Schools should be a point of unity, not division, between generations."

The quest for cost savings has heightened backing for multipurpose educational facilities and has attracted school officials, mayors, parks and recreation officials, community groups, the arts community, and senior citizens to the idea of pooling resources to build schools for everyone in a community, not just K through 12 students.

In some communities, school districts have worked with parks and recreation services to develop joint-use ventures that give residents access to health and recreational facilities located on school grounds. In 1972, for example, the school board in Arlington County, Virginia, joined forces with the local county government to build the Thomas Jefferson Jr. High School and Community Center. This joint-use project, which was one of the first in the nation involving a school, now serves about fifty-five thousand county residents monthly.

Gaylord Community School
Gaylord, Michigan

In the early 1990s, the school board in Gaylord, Michigan, had twice gone to residents to gain support for a new school building, only to be defeated both times. As a result, the board initiated an extensive outreach to the community, including senior citizens. Senior citizens were especially eager to have a performing arts center, something the city lacked. The school board adopted the community-school concept and developed a new school proposal that included day care, health care facilities, and a 600-seat performing arts center. The $25 million bond proposal subsequently gained the community's full support.

Antonia Crater Elementary School and Chehalem Senior Center
Newberg, Oregon

In 1995, Antonia Crater, a teacher in Newberg, Oregon, donated land from her family farm to create an intergenerational facility. The school district gladly accepted this generous donation, and the local parks and recreational services provided federal block grant dollars to help build the facility. The result was a new senior citizens center built adjacent to the new school that was named after Antonia Crater.

Senior citizens can walk directly into the school cafeteria for their meals and hold exercise classes in the school gym. Fourth grade students help serve the lunch to the seniors each weekday, and several classes have adopted "senior buddies." The parks and recreation service maintains the senior center and has a working agreement to use the school's athletic fields during summers.

The facility is open from 7:30 a.m. until 9:45 p.m. and has an active senior citizens group. The school board manages the facility, which receives funding from the county for community center activities. According to Ron Summers, Thomas Jefferson's long-time facilities manager, success has required a "continual awareness that this is not a typical school building."

The school district in Ankeny, Iowa, took another approach—it became the first school district in the country to own a YMCA, which is attached to the local high school. Although the school system owns the building, the local parks and recreation service manages the facility. Senior citizens and other community members have use of the pool.

Crossing the Intergenerational Divide

There are many significant reasons why educators and school facility planners should consider designing multipurpose schools that specifically contribute to stronger intergenerational links.

Ending age segregation. Designing new facilities shared by all age groups, including senior citizens, can contribute to ending the unhealthy age segregation that defines so much of America's culture today. Whether we like it or not, American society is increasingly fragmented and segmented by age, gender, income, and lifestyle. Coupled with America's fondness for the new and cutting edge, this fragmentation has helped foster a disconnection between generations. Yet, senior citizens have much to offer children, and young people have much to offer senior citizens.

By designing new schools for multipurposes, school districts can become a unifying force in a community and can help build new connections between young and old. Dyke Turner, director of planning and development at Providence Mount St. Vincent in Seattle, Washington, an intergenerational facility and assisted-living center, suggests that sharing facilities can "reconnect the generations" and end the practice of "setting them apart and devaluing the elderly."

Enriching the lives of children and seniors. Sharing educational facilities is also enriching to both children and senior citizens on an individual basis. Young children get the individual attention they require and so often lack, and senior citizens feel valued. "If you make senior citizens feel needed," according to Starla Jewell-Kelly, executive director of the National Community Education Association (NCEA), "it has a powerful impact on depression, physical health, and well-being."

Marc Freedman notes that senior citizens "possess what everybody else in society so desperately lacks: time." And he suggests that "Older Americans may well be our only *increasing* natural resource" (Freedman 1999). A growing number of grandparents, for example, are now raising their grandchildren. There are 4.5 million children under age eighteen growing up in households headed by

Intergenerational School

Cleveland, Ohio

The Fairhill Center in Cleveland, Ohio, is home to the nation's first intergenerational school. The school opened in August 2000 as a community or charter school, with thirty-one children and five full-time staff. It is located at the Fairhill Center, which assists senior citizens, including those suffering from Alzheimer's disease. The school presently has sixty students and was created to challenge the traditional, age segregation found in most schools. The school's goal, according to Catherine C. Whitehouse, principal and executive director, is to have "people of different ages come together around learning." An early focus of the school was to support grandparents who were raising children. Unfortunately, the lack of adequate facilities is one of the most significant barriers to accomplishing the school's intergenerational learning goals. Intergenerational schools in Ohio receive no funding for facilities.

grandparents, representing 6.3 percent of all school-age children. Between 2.3 and 2.4 million grandparents currently serve as caregivers, according to the U.S. Census 2000 supplementary survey.

Creating support for public education. Clearly, aging baby boomers will be a force to be reckoned with in the years ahead as they begin to retire in large numbers. School districts that encourage senior citizens to use their facilities can go a long way toward creating the good will that can help pass future school bond issues. This makes sense to NCEA's Jewell-Kelly, who notes that when "people get something from the school—when they go in and out of the building—that's when people start passing bond issues."

Public opinion in Ohio, which has begun a massive statewide effort to build new public schools at a cost of $23 billion over the next decade, supports Jewell-Kelly's notion. In a November 2001 poll conducted by the KnowledgeWorks Foundation in Cincinnati, Ohio, only forty-three percent of the respondents favored a property tax increase to build a new school. Public support for a property tax increase grew, however, to sixty-three percent when people were asked to support a new school designed as a multipurpose facility. The same poll also noted that eighty-four percent of the respondents supported community use of facilities during the afternoon, evenings, and weekends.

Keeping seniors healthy and learning. Baby boomers have gotten the message that living longer depends on healthy habits. This is a generation that has cut down on smoking and drinking and seems determined to be as young as possible for as long as possible. As a result, many baby boomers have made daily exercise a part of their lifestyle and many are eager to continue learning and to leverage available educational opportunities. But to stay active, they will need access to health, educational, and recreational facilities as they grow older; many simply cannot afford to join private health clubs.

It makes little sense, then, for public officials to spend millions of taxpayer dollars to build state-of-the-art schools with computer labs, gyms, swimming pools, and

Neveln Community Resource Center

Ankeny, Iowa

In 1994, the Ankeny school district's education advisory board conducted a community-wide survey to ascertain future needs. The survey results then became the centerpiece of a two-and-one-half-day community-planning charrette leading to the development of the Neveln Community Resource Center. The school district was instrumental in developing the center and offered to locate the proposed resource center in an unused, historic elementary school immediately adjacent to school administration offices. The school district not only provided the building but also secured a $200,000 loan for renovations from a local bank.

The Neveln Community Resource Center now houses twenty-six community groups, including the local United Way; Women, Infants, and Children's program (WIC); YMCA child care; a health center; the Ankeny Senior Center; and the Polk County congregate meal site, which provides between fifty and one hundred meals daily to senior citizens. According to Neveln's director Kevin Koester, "The seniors are a rich volunteer source" to all the agencies renting space in the building. "They are real strong throughout the building," Koester said. "They provide the United Way with at least three dozen volunteers, and seniors help with the forty-five children at the YMCA child care center." At the same time, the health center's convenient location gives senior citizens access to flu shots and podiatry care.

Building intergenerational links takes place in other ways as well in Ankeny. Ninth graders at a middle school are excused from study hall to teach senior citizens at the public library next door how to use computers so they can e-mail their grandchildren, among other things. The program began during 2001 with six senior citizens; now, twenty-four participate, and twenty-four more remain on a waiting list.

Grace Living Center
Jencks, Oklahoma

In Jencks, Oklahoma, the Grace Living Center is a combination nursing home, preschool, and kindergarten developed in partnership between the school district and a nursing home chain that invested $200,000 in the facility to add two classrooms and a playground. An extensive article in *Education Week* (Galley 2002) on the Grace Center noted that it serves 110 residents and sixty students.

Approximately seventy percent of the residents interact with the students on a regular basis. Students from the local high school Key Club come to the center daily to help teachers and to visit with residents. According to Kirby Lehman, local superintendent of schools, "The philosophy is to have a living center and not just a center where people are waiting to die."

other recreational facilities for students but deny their use to other community residents, including seniors, because they are not school age.

Intergenerational Models Do Exist

In 1998, AARP conducted a national survey of intergenerational projects and discovered more than 280 existing programs and 140 proposed ones. The most common model combined nursing homes with child care services. Other models included adult day-service centers located in the same building as a child care center; nursing homes with a child care center and before- and after-school care; senior centers with before- and after-school care or an early childhood program; geriatric care units in hospitals; and senior centers located in high schools.

AARP's intergenerational survey (Goyer and Zuses 1998) noted that school-based, shared sites were less common but are "a potential area for huge growth in the future. As schools are looking for ways to increase community involvement as well as to gain financial

Westport Senior Center and Staples High School
Westport, Connecticut

In 1998, the Westport Senior Center in Westport, Connecticut, moved into an unused wing of Staples High School, also in Westport. More than 800 senior citizens are affiliated with the center; 140 seniors use the facility daily. The immediate proximity to the school has given the senior citizens access to an indoor track, indoor pool, and weight room at all times during the day.

According to Susan Phister, the center's senior citizens coordinator, the proximity of senior citizens to students has created a rich number of intergenerational links. Among them are an annual senior/student prom, student-assisted computer training for seniors, and student home visits to fix or install seniors' computers.

Members of the senior center have lectured to journalism classes, worked with students in the engineering club, acted as tutors in the math lab, and addressed classes on Veterans' Day. Students who have broken municipal laws have been ordered to perform community service at the senior center. According to Phister, "Just the presence of the seniors changes how students behave; they are more respectful."

Unfortunately, this rich relationship between students and seniors will end in 2003 as the high school converts the space now used by the senior citizens into classroom space to alleviate overcrowding. While Phister hopes to maintain the ongoing relationship with the students through specific programs, the senior citizens will lose access to the school's physical and health facilities when they move to their own new facility in 2003.

support from older taxpayers in their communities, they can increasingly look to intergenerational-shared-site (IGSS) approaches."

In a follow-up paper, Amy Goyer (2001) noted,

> The design of shared buildings and environments can have great influence on the ease of collaboration and intergenerational interaction; common spaces often include a cafeteria/kitchen, patio/garden, restrooms and bathing facilities, pools, libraries, gymnasiums, and entrances or hallways. The facility should be designed so that shared space and traffic-flow encourage informal interactions among participants. It is also important that the various program components each have some separate space in addition to shared areas so that participants can choose their level of intergenerational involvement.

Challenges and Opportunities

Creating educational facilities that can be shared successfully by senior citizens and students presents a host of challenges and opportunities:

Recognize the spectrum of retirees. As educators and planners consider the design of new schools for greater intergenerational use, it is important to recognize the broad spectrum of retirees—they range in age, interests, and mobility. Their needs and opportunities to contribute will differ markedly depending on whether they are "younger" (just recently retired) or "older" (more than eighty years old).

Early retirees want to stay active physically and mentally and many will be eager to make a meaningful contribution to the education of children. Lewis Turpin, architect of the award-winning K through 12 Taconic Hills Central School in Craryville, New York, believes that schools can tap into the vast talent of early retirees. "These baby boomers will be different than other senior citizens," Turpin says. "Our needs will be different and what we offer will be different. This is a generation that loves to showcase its talent; children can learn just by watching, and our building is packed with display areas." Turpin suggests that schools might even consider "designing into the building think-tank space where retirees can connect with students and showcase their talent."

Older retirees, on the other hand, may simply want a gathering place to meet friends and avoid the isolation that sometimes comes with age. Having the opportunity to join children in the cafeteria for lunch or visit with them for a few minutes may satisfy their needs. It is important to remember that every individual is unique and an eighty-year-old grandmother may be as active and eager to read to children as a sixty-five-year-old who has just retired.

Community or senior center. Many baby boomers, especially the early retirees, may be reluctant to identify with any program or facility that suggests they are old. Facility planners may, therefore, want to move away from the traditional emphasis on creating facilities for seniors only and consider approaches that let the generations mingle and partake of learning opportunities that keep early retirees active and current.

Joint ventures. An architect designing and building a joint-venture project should have "plenty of patience and be willing to listen to the partners' concerns," according to Jeff Amerman, a principal in Architects Plus in Faribault, Minnesota. When designing the Northfield Community Resource Center in Northfield, Minnesota, Amerman found that seniors had the most reservations. "You have to build a team as you go through the process and help people hang in there," Amerman noted. He said that the school district was key in putting the project together, given "their strength and understanding of the construction process."

Choosing the right architect is key to the success of a joint-venture project. As Summers notes, a school district needs to "choose an architect who has built more than just schools. You need architects who have lots of experience designing and building facilities for multipurpose use."

Joint-venture projects also have their problems. For example, when planners in Newberg, Oregon, sought to build a joint elementary school and senior center, federal

restrictions hampered their use of block grant funds. "Organizational structures don't encourage agencies to work together," says Paul Frankenburger, director of physical plant services for the Newberg school district.

Funding. Jaia Peterson and Donna Butts at Generations United, a nonprofit organization that advocates greater intergenerational connections, believe the lack of information about funding sources is a significant barrier to shared-site facilities. In addition, Peterson and Butts consider the lack of explicit intergenerational language in federal requests for proposals (RFPs) and funding guidelines an obstacle. They think the federal government has the potential to play a significant role in promoting intergenerational initiatives by changing the guidelines and regulations for a wide range of established programs. Among these programs are the Older Americans Act, which supports six thousand senior centers around the country; Head Start, which operates thirteen thousand centers nationwide; and the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program, a rapidly growing after-school initiative operated by the U.S. Department of Education.

Rules make much of the federal funding categorical and restricted. Peterson and Butts note that "funding for senior centers results in facilities for seniors; funding for education creates schools for children and youth. Seniors-only communities and housing complexes build walls that isolate older people from society. Funding streams follow awareness."

Cost savings. By developing shared sites, local communities, school districts, and senior citizens can save money. The Thomas Jefferson Jr. High School and Community Center in Arlington County, Virginia, exemplifies the cost savings of operating facilities jointly. According to Summers, it has generated millions in savings over the last thirty years. The joint effort in the Northfield Community Center project, according to Amerman, produced savings that enabled the seniors to build their wellness center in the first phase of construction rather than the second phase. Amerman adds that

Northfield Community Resource Center

Northfield, Minnesota

In the fall of 2000, the Northfield Community Resource Center opened to the delight of five organizations with the vision to come together to pool their resources: the City of Northfield, Northfield Senior Citizens, Inc., Northfield Public Schools, the Three Rivers Community Action Center, and the Northfield Community Action Center. Built at a cost of $5.5 million, Northfield Center includes an alternative learning center, a senior center that incorporates a wellness and exercise facility with heated pool, and offices for a multitude of community groups.

According to city administrator Scott Neal, "The seniors had the most to lose and the most to gain" in becoming part of the collaborative effort because they had already raised funds for their own building and were already working with an architect. Nevertheless, at the urging of a local benefactor who offered a challenge grant, the seniors and the other nonprofit organizations came together to plan a joint-use facility. In 1999, voters passed a referendum that overwhelmingly supported the city's participation. Neal believes one positive result of this partnership was that seniors "ramped up their operation" and took "a huge step forward in the type of facility" they were finally able to build and occupy.

The city owns and operates the center, but a board of directors, drawn from the five project partners, manages it on a day-to-day basis. While the seniors had some initial concerns about sharing the facility with the 110 students at the alternative learning centers, those doubts disappeared. Seniors and students share the same dining area, which promotes a great deal of informal interaction between the generations. From Amerman's perspective, there is "lots of synergy none of us could have envisioned—everybody gets along better than expected."

most of the nonprofit organizations now using the Northfield Center could never have funded it on their own.

The cost of constructing the senior center in Newberg, Oregon, was initially reduced when land, adjacent to an elementary school, was donated for the facility. Cost savings can also take place through shared parking, utilities, maintenance, appropriate joint staffing, and shared transportation.

Accessibility. For older senior citizens, accessibility is integral to the success of shared sites. Easy access to parking, cafeteria, and computer labs, as well as a design that encourages easy movement, is paramount. Incorporating the principles of universal design is essential to successful shared-site projects. "Designers need to look at a much broader approach," says Turner of Providence Mount St. Vincent, "and keep the end users—kids and adults—in mind."

Finding space. To date, setting aside space for senior citizens in public schools has mostly been an afterthought or the result of informal arrangements between an open-minded principal and proactive senior citizens. The Pleasure Ridge Park High School Nutrition Center exemplifies this latter approach.

But these informal arrangements have drawbacks. Senior citizens may get only a limited amount of space or something that is temporary. The senior citizens center in Staples High School in Westport, Connecticut, for example, has had to give back its space and move out of the school because of rising enrollment.

In the future, educators and senior citizens groups may want to become involved early in the design of a new facility or major renovation and make the case that space needs to be set aside to support senior citizens and other community activities.

Conversely, established senior organizations may have space they can share with over-crowded schools. When the Clay County school system (twelve hundred students from pre-kindergarten to twelfth grade) ran out of space and had to bus students twenty miles away to another school district, associate superintendent Sharon Thurman developed an arrangement with the local Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) to use their building as the site for an alternative school and after-school program. The school system is encouraging the veterans to become mentors to the students.

Using space wisely. Architects need to pay special attention to shapes and space. "Children are perfect architectural clients, and the environment is a very important learning tool; children need lots of space," Turner says, noting there is great pressure for elderly facilities to minimize costs by offering too little space for early childhood programs.

Denise Wilson, executive director of Interages, a nonprofit group that supports intergenerational links in the Montgomery County, Maryland, school system states that it is important to recognize the need for separate space: "Some seniors may have concerns about being invaded by kids and may not want constant interaction." Seniors at the Northfield Community Resource Center, for example, wanted their own separate doorway to help maintain their identity.

Little attention seems to have been given to what type of space may be inviting to early retirees and other senior citizens. Some senior programs simply take any space they can get—an unused classroom, for example. This may have to change in the future, suggests Neal, the Northfield city administrator who explains that early retirees are "coming from office settings and want to work in modern settings that are up to date."

New life for historic school buildings. One of most significant problems that intergenerational facilities face is finding suitable space. School districts may be able to address this problem by using and actively promoting historic school buildings as intergenerational sites. Older buildings are often located in neighborhoods within walking distance for both senior citizens and children, which can eliminate some transportation costs.

Security. Any effort to design new and shared facilities will have to address the issue of security. Almost all states require background checks on adults working with children. This is a well-established policy, and school dis-

tricts seeking to create intergenerational activities will have to factor in such costs. Many architects who design shared facilities recognize these security concerns and cluster the facilities most accessible to the general public to avoid disruption of school activities.

Quality staff. Key to any successful intergenerational initiative is a quality staff that is trained to understand the needs of children and adults. Proximity alone does not create successful intergenerational initiatives. Summers from Thomas Jefferson Jr. High School says, "If a principal does not buy into the concept, it is a waste of time." AARP's Goyer notes it is "essential that staff from various program components fully embrace a shared vision that highlights the concept of building intergenerational relationships among the participants."

Having a shared vision is particularly important for nonprofit and for-profit groups that share a facility. According to Turner, these organizations may have conflicting schedules, staffing needs, and costs. Turner adds, "Part of the quality of care for kids can take place through intergenerational activities, but seniors are not substitute staff."

Conclusion: What Can Be Done?

The last decade has seen much creative thinking about how schools can be built in different ways to enhance teaching and learning and develop stronger links to the community. Schools are being built in shopping malls, in zoos, and in storefronts. Some are reaching out to the homeless and sharing space with social service agencies. Some schools are forging partnerships to share facilities with museums, community colleges, Boys and Girls Clubs, artistic groups, and municipalities. Nursing home operators are developing new links with early childhood providers. And more than a few communities are developing large multipurpose community facilities that include schools, recreational facilities, and performing arts centers.

Creative and forward looking educators, architects, and community members should be looking at the coming wave of retiring baby boomers as a positive opportunity to find new ways to build intergenerational links that help both students and senior citizens. Including senior citizens in the design and planning process and finding new ways to share facilities is a starting point, but other opportunities for action exist:

Developing new intergenerational models. Little seems to have been done to explore what type of educational facilities work best for both young people and senior citizens. New research on how the design of a facility hinders or fosters intergenerational links is needed. And new models that reflect the interests of the broad spectrum of senior citizens are needed.

Begin building a cross-generational coalition. Given the demographic trends described earlier, the time seems right for a sustained dialogue between educators and established senior groups such as AARP and the National Council on Aging about how to design new school facilities for greater intergenerational use. As a start, educators and community members at the local and state level could also reach out to local area offices on aging to create new intergenerational opportunities and find new ways to create joint-use facilities.

Expanding opportunities in the Older Americans Act. Educators may also want to become more familiar with the Older Americans Act, which provides a broad range of support for low-income senior citizens, including preventive health services, congregate meals, and home-delivered meals. Many schools, such as the Neveln Community Resource Center in Ankeny, Iowa, and the Pleasure Ridge Park High School in Louisville, Kentucky, are already sites for the congregate meal program. The coming wave of baby boomers will only make this legislation more important and a larger part of the federal budget (currently $1.3 billion) in the years ahead. The Older Americans Act specifically supports six thousand multipurpose senior centers, including numerous nutrition programs. It also authorizes support for intergenerational computer training and community service opportunities, including extensive mentoring opportunities with young people.

In the near future, many more senior centers will need to be built or expanded to support the growing number of older Americans. Why not build new multipurpose senior centers next to schools whenever possible, thus encouraging greater intergenerational opportunities? Unfortunately, according to Peterson and Butts at Generations United, the U.S. Administration on Aging, the federal agency responsible for administering the Older Americans Act, "does not encourage intergenerational programming either through its own mission or the guidance it issues to the states."

To change this way of thinking, educators may want to make a sustained case for intergenerational support and funding when Congress considers the Older Americans Act for reauthorization in 2005. Educators and supporters of intergenerational activities now have the time to develop credible empirical evidence on the costs and benefits of these types of initiatives.

Creative leadership. Ultimately, getting educators and senior citizens to recognize mutual interests will take leadership and a willingness to see the future in the here and now. This will not be entirely easy. Educators have a habit of talking only to educators. Advocates for senior citizens naturally focus on the concerns of their constituents. In doing so, both groups inadvertently perpetuate the age segregation that defines American society. As a result, the vital link between generations remains disconnected.

All this can change if educators and seniors see the coming age wave as a unique and positive opportunity to end the disconnection between generations. Equally important, by designing schools for greater intergenerational use, educators and architects can enhance support for public education in the years ahead and truly make our nation's schools centers of community.

Sources of Information on Seniors in Community Life

AARP
601 E Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20049
202-434-2277
http://www.aarp.org

Administration on Aging
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
330 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C., 20201
1-800-424-3410
http://www.aoa.gov/

Generations United
122 C Street, NW
Suite 820
Washington, D.C. 20001
202-638-1263
http://www.gu.org

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Additional Information

See the NCEF resource lists *Community Use of Facilities, Community Participation in Planning,* and *Funding Partnerships* online at *http://www.edfacilities.org/rl/*

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